

U.S. Reps. Joe Sestak (D., Pa.) and Robert E. Andrews (D., N.J.) said the Federal Aviation Administration should reconsider using nearby airports to ease excess traffic in Philadelphia.

By sending 10 percent of Philadelphia's 500,000 annual flights to Atlantic City International Airport, flight delays could be shortened from 23 minutes to nine minutes, according to a summary of studies performed by Rowan University. The cost would be about \$1 million, mostly to increase security at the Atlantic City airport.

The FAA's plans, which include an \$840 million runway expansion in Philadelphia, are expected to reduce the average flight delay by only three minutes, the study said.

"Reduction in delays will be marginal at best," Andrews said. "I think Atlantic City is very viable for a lot of travelers."

The FAA does not have authority to tell airlines where to fly, spokesman Jim Peters said. The agency has examined the feasibility of using regional airports to help ease airspace congestion and found it would not significantly reduce delays along the East Coast, he said. The FAA plan aims to reduce delays in five states.

Peters said the agency would review the Rowan study's findings.

Sestak and Andrews, who requested the Rowan study, have opposed the FAA's plan to fly more planes over their districts. In December 2007, the agency began allowing pilots to use new departure routes during peak times.

About a dozen cities, counties and groups in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut have filed an appeal to the FAA's plan to make the new flight routes permanent.

Each year, about 120,000 planes fly in and out of Atlantic City International Airport, and the airport could easily handle more, said Sharon Gordon, director of communications and marketing for the South Jersey Transportation Authority, which owns the airport.

"We could double that without a blink of an eye," Gordon said. "We have tons of capacity."

The airport runway is long enough that it can serve as an alternate landing site for space shuttles, Gordon said. The runway is 2,200 feet longer than the proposed extended runway in Philadelphia, said Chris Lacke, a Rowan math professor who helped compile the study.

Gordon also is confident that Atlantic City has sufficient infrastructure to manage greater traffic to and from the airport.

The Rowan study suggested further examination of three additional airports that could be used: Trenton-Mercer Airport, Lehigh Valley International Airport, and New Castle Airport in Delaware. Sestak said that although the FAA could not order airlines to fly out of particular airports, the agency could provide financial incentives for airlines to use airports such as Atlantic City's.

He and Andrews plan to meet with FAA and federal transportation officials to discuss the airport changes.